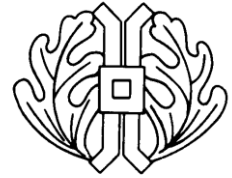




## PREVENTIVE LAW SERIES

# AUTOMOBILE REPAIRS



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The best way to avoid auto repair rip-offs is to be prepared. Knowing how your vehicle works and how to identify common car problems is a good beginning. It is also important to know how to select a good technician, the kinds of questions to ask, and your rights as a consumer.

### HOW TO CHOOSE A REPAIR SHOP

Ask for recommendations from friends, family, and other people you trust. Contact the local Better Business Bureau for help; also check the internet to see if complaints have been reported. Shop around by telephone and the internet for the best deal and compare warranty policies on repairs. Also, ask to see current licenses if state or local law requires repair shops to be licensed or registered. Make sure the shop will honor your vehicle's warranty. If your car is under its original warranty, verify that the shop's work will not void that warranty.

### HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT TECHNICIAN

Look for shops that display various certifications, such as an Automotive Service Excellence seal. A list of ASE certified technicians can be found at <http://www.ase.com/Landing-Pages/Car-Owners/Find-a-Repair-Shop/Shop-Locator.aspx>. Certification indicates that some or all of the technicians meet basic standards of knowledge and competence in specific technical areas. Ask if the technician or shop has experience working on the same make or model vehicle as yours.

### REPAIR CHARGES

Before you arrange to have any work performed, ask how the shop prices its work. Some shops charge a flat rate for labor. Others charge on the basis of the actual time the technician worked on the repair. If you need expensive or complicated repairs, consider getting a second opinion. If you decide to get the work done, ask for a written estimate. The written estimate should identify the condition to be repaired, the parts needed, and the anticipated labor charge. **Make sure you get a signed copy that also states the shop will contact you for approval for any work exceeding a specified amount of time or money.** Once the work is performed, get a completed repair order that lists each repair, parts supplied, cost of each part, labor charges, and the vehicle's odometer reading when you brought the vehicle in and after the repairs were completed. Ask for all of the bad parts to be returned to you.

### WARRANTIES AND SERVICE CONTRACTS

There is no "standard" warranty on repairs. Make sure you understand what is covered under your warranty and get it in writing. Be aware that warranties may be subject to limitations, including time, mileage, deductibles, and the businesses authorized to perform the warranty work.

Many vehicle dealers sell optional service contracts issued by vehicle manufacturers or independent companies. Not all service contracts are the same; prices vary and usually are negotiable. To help decide whether to purchase a service contract, consider:

- its cost
- the repairs to be covered as well as parts that are excluded from coverage
- whether coverage is overlapped by another warranty
- the deductible
- where the repairs are to be performed
- whether repair costs are paid directly by the company to the repair shop or whether you will have to pay first and get reimbursed; and
- the reputation of the service contract company

## DISPUTES

Document all transactions as well as your experiences with dates, times, expenses, and the names of people you dealt with. Talk to the shop manager or owner first. If that doesn't work, contact your Attorney General, Better Business Bureau, or local consumer protection agency for help. You may also file a claim in small claims court.

You may file a complaint with the Bureau of Automobile Repair (BAR), a division of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. Once you have filed the complaint, the BAR will investigate your complaint and attempt to resolve the problem. The BAR can issue citations to auto repair shops and even revoke their licenses in extreme situations. You may talk with a BAR representative and get a copy of a Complaint Form by either calling them at (800) 952-5210 or by downloading a form at <https://www.bar.ca.gov/Consumer/Complaints/index.html>.

## LEGAL ASSISTANCE SERVICES

A legal assistance attorney is available by appointment Monday through Thursday from 0800 - 1100 and 1300 - 1500, and Friday from 0900 - 1045. Powers of attorney and notaries are available Monday through Friday at the same times. For more information, please contact the Legal Assistance Office, located in Building 56, 32nd Street Naval Station, San Diego, CA, by telephone at (619) 556-2211, or our office at Naval Air Station North Island – Coronado, Building 318 – Second Deck, above the Fleet and Family Support Center, Saufley Road, by telephone at (619) 545-6437.

## RESOURCES

**Federal Trade Commission:** (877) FTC-HELP; [www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0009-military-families](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/features/feature-0009-military-families)

- Consumer Information: [www.consumer.ftc.gov](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov); (877) FTC-HELP
- File a Consumer Complaint: [www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov](http://www.ftccomplaintassistant.gov)

**California Department of Consumer Affairs:** (800) 952-5210; [www.dca.ca.gov](http://www.dca.ca.gov)

File a Complaint with the Bureau of Automobile Repair:

[www.dca.ca.gov/online\\_services/complaints/consumer\\_complaint.shtml](http://www.dca.ca.gov/online_services/complaints/consumer_complaint.shtml).

**California Department of Motor Vehicles:** (800) 777-0133; [www.dmv.ca.gov](http://www.dmv.ca.gov)

**Better Business Bureau San Diego Field Office:** (858) 496-213; [www.sandiego.bbb.org](http://www.sandiego.bbb.org)

**National Automobile Dealers Association:** [www.nada.org](http://www.nada.org)

**National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence:** (888) ASE-TEST; [www.ase.com](http://www.ase.com)